1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

price at this time of year for nearly everything, including weddings and bride-wealth, goes up.

When all the exchanges are completed everyone participating in a wedding gets some present of money, food, and clothing. The *luwali*, especially at first marriages, gets the bulk of the bridewealth and distributes the rest to the girl's family both on her mother's and her father's side. After the first marriage the girl tends to keep more and more of the bridewealth for herself, giving the *luwali* what amounts to a fee for serving as the official bride-giver. It is also important to note that when there are disputes between a husband and wife, the first person to whom both turn for arbitration is the *luwali*.

The Kanuri think of getting married in several ways. First of all they divide all marriages into first marriages (to take a girl or a small girl), and secondary marriages with a divorced woman (to take a woman or to take a divorced woman). First marriages take place for a girl around the time of puberty, while boys do not marry until they are in their late teens or early twenties, and young men of twenty-eight and twenty-nine who have not yet been married are not hard to find.

An interesting sidelight on marriage with previously unmarried young girls is the ambivalence men feel about it. Men obtain much prestige from such a marriage. But its cost invariably puts a man into great debt, and consummation of the marriage itself, traditionally, is a semi-public affair in which old women related to the girl sit outside the marriage hut and whisper to their newly-wed relative that she must resist the advances of her husband. They do this until very late at night or until they are given some proof of the girl's virginity by the husband. They then make a fearful clatter in the town or village to announce the premarital chastity of their young relative. Standards of personal appearance and sexual attraction are important to Kanuri men and center on more sexually mature women. Such standards deal with hair style, facial symmetry, type of walk, and other physical attributes and skills, as well as ability at wifely chores. None of these attributes are in any degree well-developed among young girls, so that the man must control himself and almost publicly proclaim his manhood and sexual prowess with a young girl who is not defined as sexually exciting by the culture. This causes much anxiety and I have seen men praying almost continually for several weeks in order to gain the strength to carry out a virgin's consummation. It is important to note that when some western educated Kanuri talk about marriage they immediately fasten on this semi-public consummation of the girl's first marriage as a custom that will be dropped in the future, and certainly one they do not intend to carry out or even allow in their lives. From the girl's point of view, as education in western-style schools becomes more common and the length of time in school increases, then the time of first marriage for the girls will move ahead. At present however there are only a handful of Kanuri girls who attend schools beyond the age of traditional marriage.

But what is the basis for the conflict? Why are men willing to suffer to gain such an unattractive wife? Men always explain it in the same way. A young girl has never been touched sexually by other men; he is the first; he can train her as he likes, and teach her to be a proper wife to suit his own personal wishes. Besides, it is a good Muslim custom, they always add, as they do about almost every custom when they are asked. In this case they are correct, for such young marriages are very

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

58 often people use old women for such purposes. He was anxious about the gift and
159 so went to an expert on medicines who gave him a couple of special kola nuts whose
• [832] magical love potion power would direct the woman to find him irresistible. His confidence thus buoyed up, he visited her himself and they had a short affair. He tasted her cooking, observed her behavior, and after two weeks sent a friend to the older brother to arrange for the marriage payments. Three weeks later, after the marriage was proposed to the *luwali,* (in this case her older brother), the couple were married. Modu was delighted and later assured me that for most of the entire six months they remained married he was quite happy. In the end they quarreled bitterly because his wife was out of the house visiting much too often for him not to be suspicious of her fidelity. Finally he simply told her to pack her things and leave his house.

183 The case illustrates the ease with which Kanuri men and women moved in
586 and out of marriage—a perfectly normal pattern in Bornu. Bornu is a land where divorces are very common, and a marriage break-up is never the social and psychological catastrophy it can easily be in the west. To understand why we must look more closely at Kanuri married life.

Married Life

592 By comparison with western society, Kanuri husbands are at home a great
593 deal. The home is the center of activities where men take their leisure, visit their
512 friends, and receive visitors all day long. If at all possible they carry out their occupational activities in the household making it the central location for their daily work. Such constant contact of husband and wife in the household is rather rare in western society. Paradoxically however, husbands and wives are far less intimate and friendly than they are in the west. In their daily lives, women cook, nurse young children, bring water for the household if there is no well, help in the fields, grow garden crops and maize in the back of the compound, prepare cooked and uncooked foods, make pots, trade, and visit one another to help with the preparation of ceremonies as well as for companionship and hairdressing. Men clear the fields and plant crops, work at a large number of crafts including modern ones such as truck driving or using Singer sewing machines; they also engage in religious activities as specialists, and carry out specialized political, judicial and medical roles.

593 In upper class families, women are in *purdah* (restricted to the household)
562 and live at the back of the compound furthest away from its entrance. They leave
565 the compound only on rare occasions and even then they must seek the permission of their husbands well in advance. They are usually accompanied on such excursions by servants who may escort the upper class lady half way across the emirate to visit her own family for a ceremony at which her presence is required. On the other hand, peasant women must go to the well at least twice a day for water, and in some villages this means a walk of several miles. These women work on the farm plots of the various members of the household during the short growing season and sell cooked foods. Ordinary women use the occasions away from their husband's households to meet and talk freely with other women, and sometimes, of course, with other men.

583 A man who started using his wife's dowry without her knowledge and con-
593 sent would have a fine argument on his hands immediately and most prob-
[586] ably a divorce proceeding. One mother turned her young adolescent son
[685] over to a judge for a whipping because he took one of the enamel plates
156 from her dowry to sell for cash. A woman's concept of her own personal
583 worth is tied closely to her dowry. During her youth, it is the material expression of her relationship to her own family background. Later, as her independence grows and she adds to the dowry, she looks on it more as her personal property, her savings, which give her a measure of value
[585] in her immediate society. She can say of herself that she has 250 enamel dishes, while her younger co-wife has only 125.

581 The Kanuri recognize different varieties of marriage and have separate terms for each of them. Whether these are in fact different forms is a question of interpretation which will be discussed later.

The first and most important distinction about a marriage concerns the virgin status of the woman. This consequently divides all marriages into two broad categories depending upon whether or not the female has ever been married before. If she has, the marriage is described as kamu gwojin (he takes a woman). Conversely, if the female is a virgin, the union is termed a fero gwojin (he takes a girl or virgin). All informants agreed that union with a virgin is the most highly valued form of marriage in their society. They explained this by pointing to the chaste state of the girl. She is not used, they say, and this is
[832] good. However it should be noted that informants were also agreed that virgin girls were not sexually exciting or attractive. One informant, a man of about forty years of age was observed in almost constant prayer for a whole week preparing for his first night of virgin marriage which very nearly ended in failure, only succeeding on the second attempt with the aid of magical devices.

837 households when her husband was away. Several informants remarked that it was apparent, now her husband was away, that she wished to have some tum-tum (pleasure, with a sexual implication).

593 837 Whether or not the husband is away, women must leave the compound for ceremonies, water carrying, helping other women to prepare for ceremonies, going to market, etc. Only men with wives in seclusion can restrict, and then only partially, female activities beyond the household. Within this framework, all Kanuri men know from their own experience how easily liaisons can be set up with married women, and therefore become anxious and mistrustful of wives who leave the compound too often.

837 584 The covert subversion of marital fidelity norms is also illustrated in the role of the sàrsàr. The sàrsàr is an old woman who for a fee, acts as an intermediary between a man and a married woman in promulgating a future marriage between them, which presumes the divorce of the woman from her present husband. The relationship arranged between the man and the married woman by the sàrsàr often (684) infers an adulterous sexual union as well. If discovered by the husband, the old woman is often taken into court with her male employer and fined heavily. However, among males who value their respectability, the old woman is usually warned at first to stay away from the compound, and the wife admonished not to have anything to do with her.

832 Another illustration that documents the social recognition of female desire for sexual freedom is the concept of tarwo which refers to walking about looking for a partner for sexual intercourse. Any man or woman walking about the town alone is suspect of tarwo. There are a few definitive signs such as man having his hat pushed for-

832 ward or a woman talking to men out in the open beyond her compound walls, or immoderate behaviour at a dance. However, the conditions are extremely vague and really boil down in the last analysis to a recognition of universally held motivations rather than any definite behaviour. Informants simply take it for granted that almost any one, including the anthropologist, indulges in sexual intercourse of illicit nature given the opportunity.

831 833 The extent of male dominance is not the only variable controlling the incidence of adultery among females. There is also the appeal of skill, attraction, and variety in sexual experience. The Kanuri value skill in intercourse and value the experience itself as a highly pleasurable one which varies greatly from person to person. For example, informants seemed agreed on the pleasure-giving attributes of certain physiological variations in the male and female genitalia, and scaled these as being better or worse for sexual intercourse. Consequently, wide sexual experience is desirable from the point of 578 837 view of sensual pleasure. Besides this sensual factor, the writer received the impression that there is a covert recognition of a general female desire to subvert male dominance. This seems to be expressed in the attempts by women to obtain sexual freedom, which the male practises, but forbids and tries to prohibit to the female. This latter point was illustrated over and over again by the attitudes of some of the younger more vocal wives, who constantly joked about adultery or made allusions to it, as a kind of game or trick that a wife plays on her husband.

837 628 One final point can be made about the locus of marital infidelity. As will be shown later, groups of Kanuri towns and villages are joined together into marketing communities. Furthermore, well